Mount Joy Walking Challenge

BACKGROUND

Due to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area's quickly growing population, GO rail ridership is expected to double between 2016 and 2031. Today approximately 85% of station parking lots are near or at capacity.[1] According to Metrolinx's 2041 Regional Transportation Plan service expansion plans, stations will need to serve the additional customers with no significant increase in parking capacity.[2]

Metrolinx is currently testing different approaches to changing travel behaviour from driving alone and parking at the stations to other modes. Metrolinx hired UrbanTrans North America (UrbanTrans) to develop and implement a pilot campaign to encourage walking to the Mount Joy GO station in Markham. As of 2017, there were approximately 1,700 commuters regularly using the station. That number is projected to climb over 4,000 by 2031 with 1,333 parking spaces. Mount Joy was an ideal selection because of the pedestrian infrastructure surrounding the station. Additionally, 75% of GO station commuters live within a two-kilometre radius.

By 2031

4,000

commuters will be using the station, and there will only be

1,333

parking spaces.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Metrolinx's goal is to integrate successes from pilots into business practices and to determine how to scale up successful pilots across the GO station network. The parameters of the project were to invite Mount Joy Station users to try walking to the station over an eight-week period (October 7 to November 30, 2019). Metrolinx offered $25 in PRESTO credit for participation as well as a draw to win one of two additional $100 PRESTO vouchers.

The project was considered a success, with a 20% increase in walking.

Through the pilot, UrbanTrans explored the impact of different behaviour change interventions and gathered insights into commuter motivations. The project was considered a success, with a 20% increase in walking.

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[1]GO Rail Station Access Plan, December 12, 2016, p. 2

[2]2041 Regional Transportation Plan, 2018, p. 76

WALKING PILOT CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Outreach Event + Flyers → Quiz → Baseline Survey → 8-week challenge + email campaign → End point survey

The project team knew the challenges of gaining the attention of busy commuters. To recruit participants, the team developed a short and entertaining "walking personality" quiz to determine a participant's qualification for the campaign (Appendix A). The quiz was promoted heavily through an in-person outreach event on the station platform. The event occurred during the morning rush hour four weeks before the pilot, with a temperature of approximately 10°C and no precipitation. Staff set up a booth on the platform with free refreshments and a "walking personality" activity. The project team also promoted the quiz using posters, flyers, station announcements, and GO listserv emails (see all in Appendix B). The team also distributed 3,000 flyers on the platform and on commuter cars.

A total of 340 people completed the quiz, approximately one out of every five Mount Joy commuters. Sixty-three percent heard about it at the outreach event or from receiving a flyer on the platform, and 23% had joined after seeing the flyer on their car. Of the 340 quiz takers, **225 were invited to the pilot.** These eligible participants were led through a tailored communication strategy encouraging them to commit to participating in the pilot. Those who did not initially sign up were sent a "nudge" email, resulting in 16 additional pilot participants. The recruitment strategy was successful in **signing up 54 commuters to the pilot**.

What kind of walker are you?

WE KNOW YOU'VE BEEN WONDERING. TAKE OUR QUIZ TO FIND OUT.

Win one of three $100 ⮕ PRESTO vouchers!

Half of Mount Joy commuters live within walking distance of the station. Are you one of the lucky ones? This Fall we're challenging Mount Joy commuters to arrive here on foot instead of by car.

START WITH OUR 2-MINUTE QUIZ

bit.ly/walkmountjoy

⮕ METROLINX

Flyers and posters were used to promote the walking personality quiz.

A total of 340 people completed the quiz, approximately one out of every five Mount Joy commuters.

A CLOSER LOOK: THE STRATEGY

The pilot was called the **Mount Joy Walking Challenge** to appeal to commuter competitiveness with neighbours as fellow "Challengers." A key aspect of the Challenge was targeting commuters most capable of shifting behaviour. Based on behaviour models, this pilot used a balance of **ability, motivation,** and **prompts** to identify and coach commuters to try walking.[3] Prompts included weekly motivational emails which communicated important information and bolstered Challenge engagement.

To overcome the barrier of trip planning, the team created personalized travel plans for each participant. It included a walking route to the station, the route's distance and number of steps, and carbon emission saved from walking over driving (Appendix C). This was followed by weekly encouragement that included humorous content and educational stats about the lesser-known benefits of walking to keep participants motivated (Appendix D). These plans included social norming techniques to encourage regular walking, citing the walking frequency of other Challengers. The plans also helped track walking behaviour.

The weekly emails were used to build a relationship with participants and ensured they were comfortable sharing their personal information, such as PRESTO card numbers. These emails had an **average open rate of 83%**, ranging from 74% to 93% over the 8 weeks, with a dip in engagement at the halfway mark. Six participants consistently did not open emails. They were sent a different subject line in Week 6. That email was successful in re-engaging half of them in the campaign. See Appendix E for complete email data.
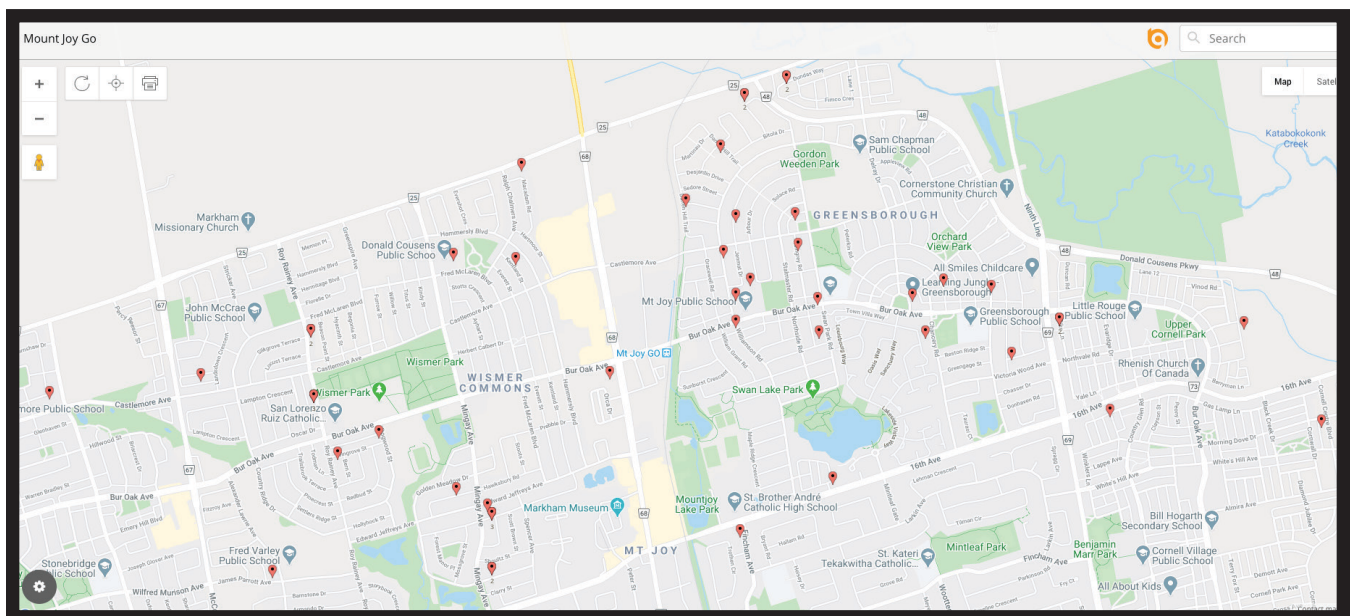
Participants' home locations

Finally, to earn their PRESTO incentives, participants were required to take a post-campaign survey. Only one participant officially dropped out of the Challenge due to upcoming surgery.

CAMPAIGN RESULTS

Fifty-four commuters took the baseline survey during registration, indicating their interest in participating in the Challenge. Of these, 43 took an end point survey. See Appendix F and Appendix G for full survey results. The following key results showcase the campaign's impact.

MODE SHIFT

There was a significant increase in walking among pilot participants during the Challenge compared to the 12 months prior, from 7% to 27%, while drive alone rates dropped from 69% to 45%.

A note about the weather

The weather did not seem to have a large impact on the frequency of walking.

Out of the 20 business days:
- It rained 5 days
- It snowed 6 days
  (mostly around Weeks 5 and 6)

In the first half of the Challenge (Oct. 7 to Nov. 3), the low temperature was between -0.9 and 6.7°C.

In the second half of the Challenge (Nov. 4 to 30), the weather was noticeably cooler. The low temperature was between -16.2 and 4.2°C.
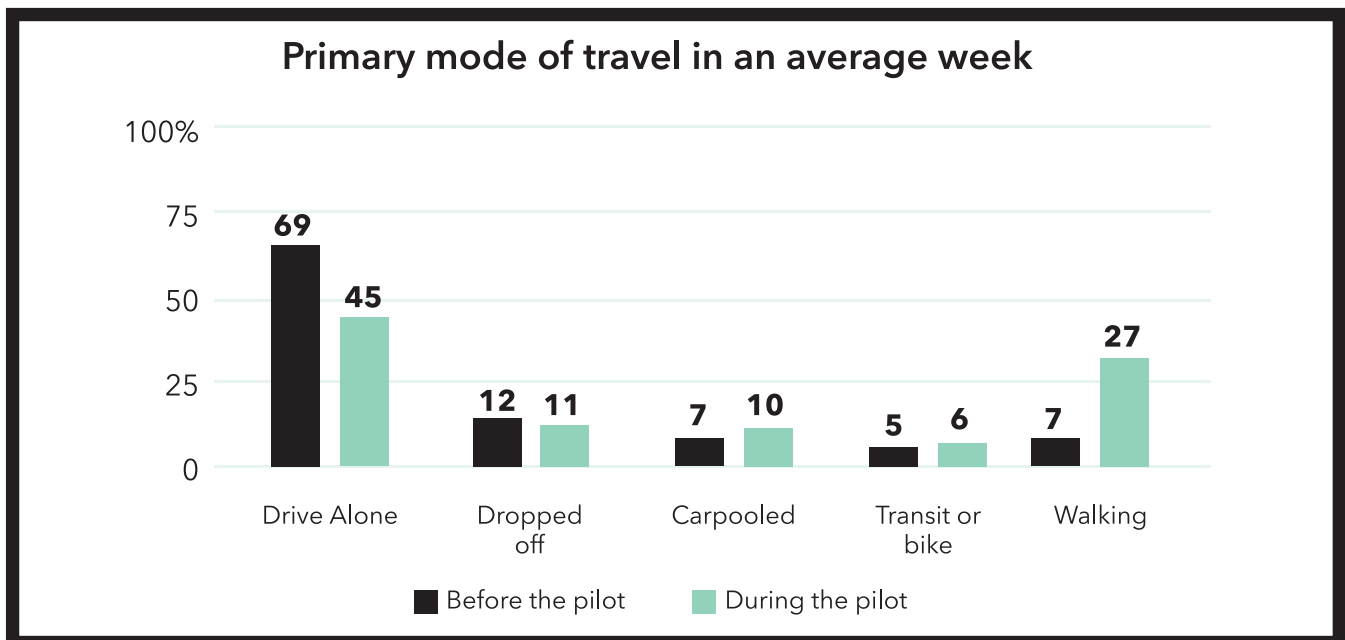

Figure 1: Mode data from baseline and end point surveys

After the pilot, participants stated that they will continue to walk at much higher levels than before. Figure 2 shows how often participants believe they will walk in the 12 months after the Challenge, with over 70% citing at least one day per week. Of the participants who never walked to the station before the pilot, or only walked once per month, 52% plan to continue walking to the station at least once per week.

The weekly motivational emails contained an embedded survey. Participants were asked, "How many days did you walk to Mount Joy GO station this week?"

1.5
average walking days each week

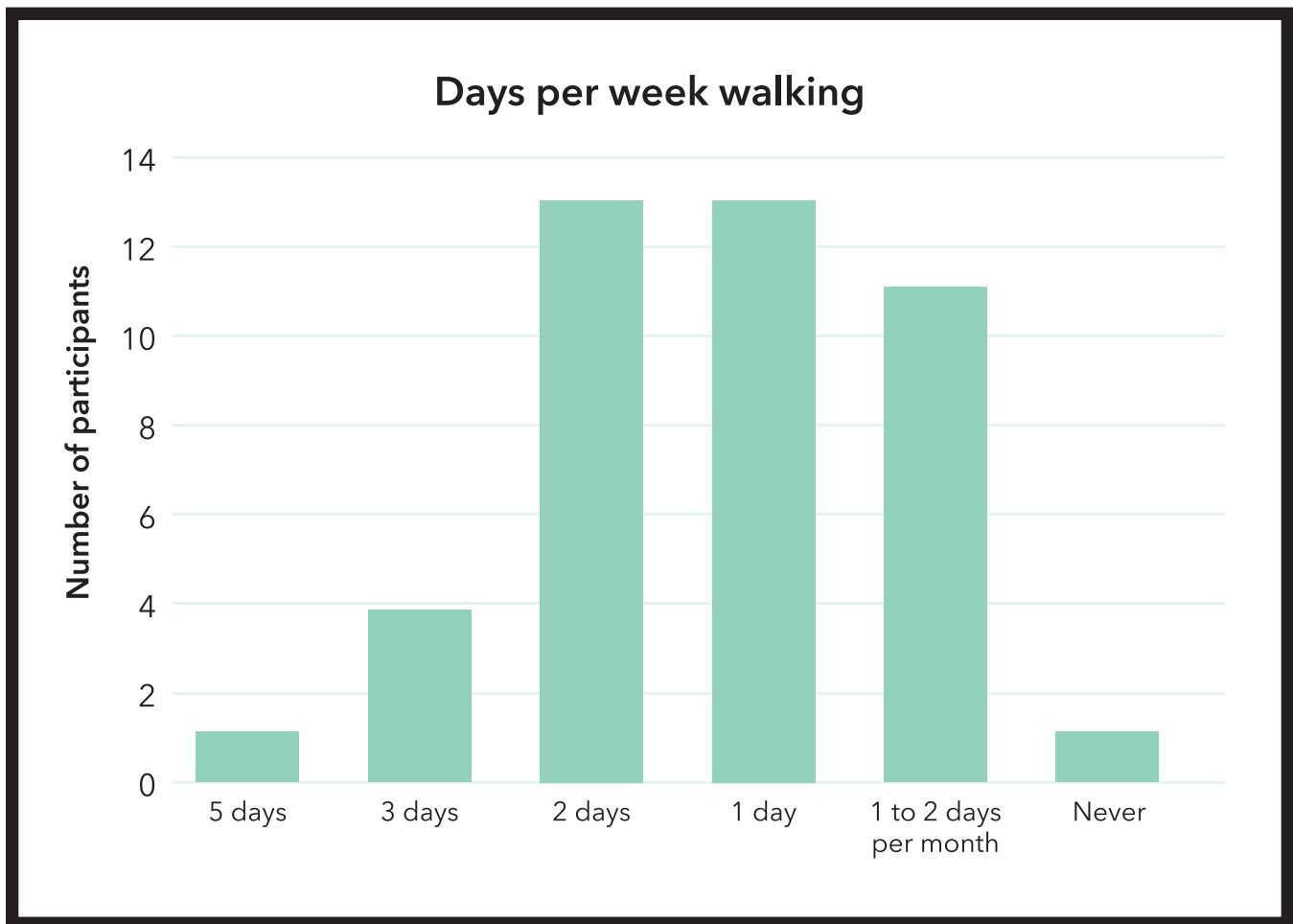## Days per week walking

Number of participants

Figure 2: End point survey: "How frequently do you expect that you will continue to walk to the GO station during a typical or average week over the next 12 months?"

WALKING BARRIERS

Participants were asked in the baseline survey what prevented them from walking to the station more often. Participants cited similar barriers when asked on the end point survey, although the proportions shifted slightly.

The types of barriers indicated in both surveys are situational and environmental, and therefore, are hard to address with policies or infrastructure improvements. The most effective way to overcome them is to motivate people to experience the new behaviour for themselves. As evident in the mode shift data, once many commuters tried walking to the station, they realized that these barriers did not affect their ability to walk every day.

Reasons for not walking

Before Campaign	After Campaign
68% - It takes too long	**67% -** The weather was poor (e.g. rain / snowstorm)
57% - The weather	**44% -** I was worried about not having enough time to catch my train and decided to try and drive (or get a ride) instead
29% - I need my car nearby for school / day-care drop-off or to run errands on the drive home	**28% -** I needed the car nearby for school / day-care drop-off or to run errands on the drive hoem
20% - It is more stressful	**26% -** It was (seasonally) too dark when I planned to leave or return home (due to the lack of sunlight, making it feel unsafe)
16% - I have to cross busy streets, there is fast moving traffic	
11% - Unplowed / icy sidewalks / pathways	**19% -** I felt too tired or like I didn't have enough energy to walk
9% - It is less direct	
7% - I already walk for the vast majority of my trips to the GO station	**7% -** I had an offer for a ride to the station and preferred the option and / or the company to walking alone
5% - Security issues like poorly lit areas or I worry for my personal security due to the route	
4% - Physical obstructions like debris and fences	

MOTIVATIONS

The majority of pilot participants (60%) listed the $25 PRESTO card reward as one of their top three reasons for joining the Challenge on the end point survey. This was followed by reducing carbon emissions (44%) and getting more exercise (28%). Although participants found environmental and health reasons to be motivating, they did not change their behaviour until they were offered a financial incentive. The campaign promotional materials emphasized the PRESTO credit but did not cite any health or environmental benefits of walking.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Pilot participants were asked to provide demographic information on the baseline survey. Their ages ranged from 18 to 64, aligning with working age commuters. The largest age group was 35 to 44 years old (34%) and 82% were under 45. Income levels varied, with the largest group making between $100,000 and $149,999 annually (29%). Participants reporting an annual income of below $50,000 were the most likely to complete the Challenge, at a rate of 100%. There was no significant relationship between income and completion rate for higher earners.

On the end point survey, participants were also asked to rate how useful they found various elements of the campaign in encouraging them to walk to and from the station. Many of the elements were viewed as slightly, moderately, or very useful.

72%
PRESTO voucher

69%
Information on the number of steps and distance walked

66%
Clear explanation of the Walking Challenge terms and conditions during registration

59%
Engagement emails received during the pilot

59%
Information about carbon emissions avoided by walking instead of driving

PILOT SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MODE SHIFT ASSESSMENT

The Mount Joy Walking Pilot was successful in recruiting a good representation of GO station users and encouraged them to change their commuting behaviour over an eight-week period. Most importantly, the majority of participants intend to continue walking to the station, at least occasionally, after the incentive is removed. A follow-up survey conducted within one year of the pilot end date is recommended to assess the accuracy of these intentions.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

An eye-catching promotional campaign paired with appealing prize incentives enticed 20% of Mount Joy commuters to take the pilot qualifying quiz. Since the majority of participants learned about the quiz through the outreach event, it would be beneficial to allocate additional resources to this element. The PRESTO vouchers were critical in getting people to join the Challenge and an important motivating factor in encouraging their walking behaviour week after week. Testing various pricing levels would help determine if they lead to significantly different outcomes.
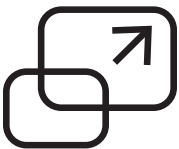
POTENTIAL FOR SCALING

The campaign's success suggests the pilot could be scaled up to contribute to Metrolinx's station access goals. The Walking Challenge approach can be applied to other GO stations and other alternative travel modes, particularly transit and cycling. The promotional materials, surveys, contest rules and other legal documents could serve as templates, packaged together in a campaign kit. Scaling up would require a secure automated system for entering and verifying participant PRESTO card data instead of the current manual entry process. Marketing automation software would further streamline the email journey to communicate with much larger numbers of commuters simultaneously.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

Behaviour change campaigns are an important part of GO Station access improvements. The most commonly reported barriers to walking were habit-based such as schedule or comfort. Addressing improved station access as a cultural shift can accelerate the transition to alternative modes. The most effective way to shift commuters towards walking or other alternatives is to identify the best candidates and prompt them to experience the new behaviour.